

Dear Chairman Martin:

I am writing to challenge the Comcast/Time Warner/Adelphia merger (FCC Docket No. 05-192) and the AT&T/BellSouth merger (FCC Docket No. 06-74). Allowing the largest telecommunications company and the two largest cable companies in the United States to grow even larger does not serve the public interest.

The concentration of media power is a growing problem in this country. Though we have more channels available than ever before, they are increasingly falling under the control of a handful of giant corporations. The cost of broadband service also remains out of reach for many households. Americans are hungry for more competition in services. However, these mergers will only starve Americans of this needed competition.

Allowing AT&T to combine with BellSouth will give the top three broadband providers control of over half of all broadband connections in the country. At the same time, the Time Warner/Comcast/Adelphia merger will give Comcast and Time Warner increased power over entire regions of the United States, allowing rates to rise even as the digital divide continues to grow.

Things were fine until the forced breakup of the Bell system some 30 or 40 years ago. Telecommunications have gotten ever more expensive and dysfunctional since then, no longer serving most of the public. These proposed (and often accomplished) mergers paste back together the monopolistic corporate hold that the Bell breakup was supposed to remedy, only at a much more expensive level now, reversing whatever good might have come of the initial fragmentation of the Bell system, if indeed there was any benefit at all. Re-merging of separate companies will not fix the mistaken fragmentation -- it will only make the present situation worse in many aspects. Corporations bent on profit at the expense of the general public make everyone except shareholders suffer, and the FCC would do serious disservice by aiding this trend. The rich already own the U.S. Please don't make the situation worse!

The FCC should block these transactions or impose strict conditions to protect free speech and competition under its "public interest standard." If the FCC decides to allow either of these mergers, it should require the following conditions:

1. Subscribers must be able to choose from competitive Internet Service Providers ("open access"). The FCC should also ensure that these companies cannot discriminate against any Internet content or rival service and that every service will be treated exactly the same ("Network Neutrality").
2. Companies must be required to sell broadband access separate from video and telephone service, and at the same price ("naked broadband" or "unbundling").

3. Any subscriber must be able to connect any device to the network (such as a Wi-Fi router) that does not harm the network.
4. Take steps to protect public access programming ("PEG"). Cable companies have become less responsive to the needs and requirements of communities. The quality of public accountability in local franchise agreements has declined, as big companies leverage their power to squeeze local governments. Likewise, telecommunications giants — like AT&T — are trying to eliminate the remaining vestiges of effective local oversight and control altogether.
5. Independent programmers must be able to reach subscribers. We are required to buy channels we don't want or need because providers of video service bundle them together.
6. Any company that owns both programming and video systems should be required to provide competitors with access to their regional sports and other programming needed to offer competing services, so consumers will still have real choices.

Corporate media and communications interests are politically biased, making understanding complex situations very difficult for most of our citizens, as well as making cable TV, telephone, and internet access very expensive, or out of affordable range, for those of us on budgets that can't handle these increasingly higher fees and additional surcharges that keep coming at us. An informed public is an enlightened and capable public. Information is constantly suppressed, or supplanted on TV by "reality-show" escapism, 24/7 shopping networks, and "infomercial" programming, instead of presenting various sides of real issues that affect our personal, national, and global well-being, and that we NEED to be able to understand and make up our minds about after understanding all sides of the complexities facing us today. This is even critical to wise voting in our elections. Most TV programming has been and is still crap and mind-numbing pap, no matter how many "new" channels get bundled together.

In conclusion, I ask the FCC to consider the interests of the people like me who pay the cable, telephone and broadband bills and watch the programming. Many of us already have enough trouble trying to afford broadband or cable TV. Please don't make it even harder for us to find competitors, or make it easier for Comcast, Time Warner and AT&T to raise prices or block local and independent voices.